

January 26, 1977

The Honorable Richard Ottinger
The House of Representatives
United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Ottinger:

Thank you for your recent letter commenting on my participation at the briefing on Recombinant DNA on December 14, 1976, under the sponsorship of the Scientists Institute for Public Information. Perhaps you will recall that years ago we shared in a car pool for our young children attending the National Child Research Center.

As you indicated in your letter, you were unable to attend the briefing yourself. Enclosed is a copy of my statement. I am sending it on by way of comment on your remarks printed in the Congressional Record of 19 January 1977 on this subject.

More specifically, I certainly share with you a concern over the urgency of establishing firm and enforceable guidelines for the conduct of this research within the private sector. For the past several months a Federal Interagency Committee, established at the request of the President under the chairmanship of the Director, National Institutes of Health, has been studying the available authorities. It is expected to report shortly, and to recommend whether or not existing agencies have sufficient authority to promulgate and enforce such guidelines or whether legislative action is needed. It is my belief that the Congress should await the report of this Committee before taking any action.

Further, I should like to point out certain additional problems raised by your statement. The relevant scientific evidence is not consistent with the notion that any or all organisms containing recombinant DNA would either "have a capacity for unlimited proliferation" or be uncontrollable. These are rather sweeping and unwarranted generalizations. The characterization of *E. coli* in your statement is also not an accurate description of the particular

E. coli being used for recombinant DNA experiments, as discussed in my statement. The NIH Draft Environmental Impact Statement is not properly quoted in your remarks. The numbers you quote were given as totally hypothetical numbers in order to exemplify a particular calculation and the Draft EIS indicates that. The numbers are not presented as a description of the aggregate risk of an epidemic. In addition, the NIH guidelines explicitly prohibit workers under treatment with antibiotics or antacids (or suffering from a variety of relevant disorders) from carrying out recombinant DNA research.

It is my view that far from being weak, the NIH guidelines are quite stringent and afford confidence that potentially dangerous recombinants will not escape from laboratory situations.

You may know that I was among the first scientists to call attention to the potential hazards of recombinant DNA research in 1973. I have been involved in all of the discussions since then. If there is any way in which I can be of help in your consideration of this issue please call upon me.

Finally, while I am an employee of the National Institutes of Health, this letter represents my own personal opinion.

Sincerely yours,

Maxine Singer, Ph.D.
Head, Nucleic Acid Enzymology Section
Laboratory of Biochemistry

Enclosure